

# Dallas Cowboys

**2011 Record:** 8-8

**Pythagorean Wins:** 8.6 (13th)

**DVOA:** 3.5% (14th)

**Offense:** 5.9% (12th)

**Defense:** 0.4% (16th)

**Special Teams:** -2.1% (25th)

**Variance:** 11.9% (13th)

**2012 Mean Projection:** 7.5 wins

**On the Clock (0-4):** 10%

**Mediocrity (5-7):** 41%

**Playoff Contender (8-10):** 40%

**Super Bowl Contender (11+):** 9%

**Postseason Odds:** 26.8%

**Projected Average Opponent:** 4.0% (2nd)

**2011:** One more win, and maybe that big playoff run could have been theirs.

**2012:** In a good division, good may not be good enough.

The Dallas Cowboys' 2011 season ended in a 31-14 Week 17 loss to the New York Giants. Both teams entered the game at 8-7, but the loss sent the Cowboys home to watch the playoffs on TV, while New York enjoyed a run to the Super Bowl. The game put a critical Cowboys weakness on fine display, as Victor Cruz and Hakeem Nicks repeatedly burned Dallas cornerbacks for a series of big plays. Knowing how close they had come to beating the eventual Super Bowl champs, the 'Boys went to work patching the enormous holes in their secondary. However, as they fixed that flaw, they ignored another one, one that hurt them all season. And since they did little to address the issue, it's likely to hurt them again in 2012. Given the competitive nature of the NFC East, it could cost them a playoff spot.

Let's get the first weakness out of the way: Dallas' cornerbacks were lousy last season. That's bad for any defense, but especially for a defense with a Ryan in charge. As our strategic tendencies tables show, Rob Ryan likes to blitz, but when he counted on his corners to win one-on-one matchups last year, they usually lost (Table 1).

Four Dallas cornerbacks saw significant action last year—Alan Ball, Terence Newman, Mike Jenkins, and Orlando Scandrick—and none of them ranked in the top 30 in yards per pass allowed. In a league where you really need three good cornerbacks to get by, Dallas had none.

That's especially telling since they play with one of

the league's great pass rushers in DeMarcus Ware. It can be hard sometimes to separate the performance of pass rush from coverage, but in Dallas' case the distinction was about as clear as it could be. On all pass plays, including sacks and intentional grounding calls, they gave up 6.7 yards per play, which ranked 24th. Like all teams, they played much better when they got pressure on the quarterback, cutting that down to 3.5 yards per play, which still ranked 26th. However, on those plays where opposing quarterbacks came under pressure but escaped and still managed to get a pass away, Dallas gave up an average of 7.1 yards, and that was the highest such figure in the league.

This weakness in the backfield killed Dallas on third downs, where they ranked sixth against the run, but 30th against the pass and 29th overall. Not surprisingly, they played better on short third downs (13th) than they did in middle distance (32nd) or long (29th) situations.

At the end of the year, the worst of the bunch (Terence Newman) was released, while the others were

**Table 1: Live By The Blitz, Die By The Blitz**

Rushers	Yards/Play	Rank
3	5.69	11
4	6.55	15
5	7.51	30
6+	7.93	29

2012 Cowboys Schedule					
Week	Opp.	Week	Opp.	Week	Opp.
1	at NYG (Wed.)	7	at CAR	13	PHI
2	at SEA	8	NYG	14	at CIN
3	TB	9	at ATL	15	PIT
4	CHI (Mon.)	10	at PHI	16	NO
5	BYE	11	CLE	17	at WAS
6	at BAL	12	WAS (Thu.)		

demoted. Dallas went out and got themselves a shiny new pair of starters, signing Brandon Carr to a five-year, \$50.1 million contract in free agency and trading up in the draft to select LSU's Morris Claiborne.

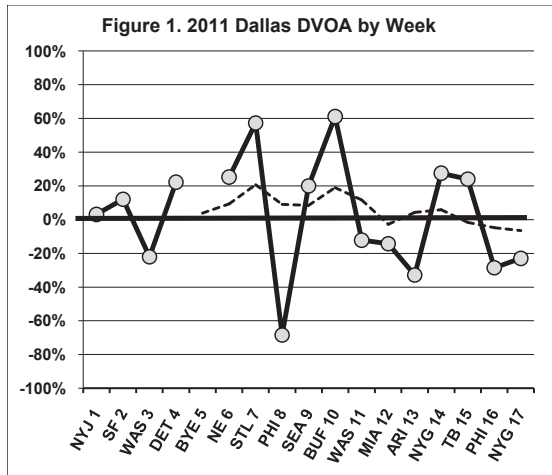
For the past four years, Carr has been the lesser half of one of the league's top cornerback tandems in Kansas City. However, he has steadily improved throughout his career, and in 2011 he actually had better metrics than teammate Brandon Flowers (Table 2).

Carr is only 26 years old, and may not have peaked yet. On the other hand, he's never been the top corner on his team before. Still, he's a clear upgrade over what Dallas had last season, and he should provide the Cowboys with a half-decade of quality starting play. This was a wise signing.

Obviously, we have less of a track record for Claiborne. Draft expert Russ Lande, enamored with Claiborne's coverage ability, ball skills, size (5-foot-11), and speed (4.5-second 40-yard dash), liked him more than former LSU teammate Patrick Peterson and said he would start from Day One for several teams in the league. While his potential may be mile-high, however, he's still a rookie, and history has not always been kind to first-year high-profile corners. Between 2005 and 2011, 26 cornerbacks were drafted in the first round (including guys like Antrel Rolle who started as corners before moving to safety later). The best of those, as a rookie, was Cleveland's Joe Haden, who finished 14th in success rate and 13th in yards per pass. After that, though, the pickings get slim quickly. Seven of these players failed to qualify for the cornerback lead-

**Table 2: Brandon Carr, Year-By-Year**

Year	Tgt%	Rk	Dist	Suc%	Rk	AdjYd	Rk	PD	Int
2008	18.3%	37	11.6	41%	75	8.3	60	6	2
2009	18.9%	22	13.2	53%	38	7.2	36	19	1
2010	20.5%	7	16.0	59%	15	7.4	48	25	1
2011	20.9%	17	15.0	55%	27	6.2	17	13	4



boards. For the other 19, the average success rate was 49 percent, with an average of 7.9 yards per pass allowed. Only four finished in the top 30 in yards per pass allowed. And that includes many players who only saw nickel action against third and fourth wideouts. If we limit our list to the nine rookies who made 10 or more starts, those who faced the toughest competition, the average success rate falls to 47 percent, and the average yards per pass climbs to 8.5. Claiborne could have a good season for a rookie and still be no better than the subpar veterans he is replacing. Claiborne may well be a Pro Bowler in 2015, but expectations this year should be much, much lower (Table 3).

The Cowboys completely overhauled their cornerback stable, but made few other changes on defense, because few other changes needed to be made. Their front seven was a particular strength. Dallas played excellent run defense, especially after Jason Hatcher returned from a strained calf that cost him three games in October. In the first half of the year, the Cowboys ranked 18th in run defense DVOA. In the second half, that ranking climbed to sixth.

While the Cowboys expect a slew of new defensive backs to lead a turnaround on defense, they've left the offense mostly alone. And why not? This team is stacked at the skill positions. Tony Romo has ranked in the top 10 in passing DVOA in each of his six seasons as a starter, peaking last year when he finished fourth. DeMarco Murray was among the top 10 runners in both DVOA and DYAR despite starting only seven games. They have depth at those positions too. New backup quarterback Kyle Orton has ranked in the top 25 in passing DVOA each of the past four years and could start for a handful of teams. Felix Jones had

some fumble issues (three in 127 runs, the second-worst rate of all runners with at least 100 carries), but still averaged 4.5 yards per carry and finished in the top 10 in success rate. Fullback Tony Fiammetta was a crushing blocker, but couldn't stay healthy, missing 14 games in the past three seasons. In his place the Cowboys signed Lawrence Vickers (two missed games in the past three seasons), so expect another heavy dose of I-formation runs.

The top level of the receiver depth chart is just as strong, though the depth is lacking. At wide receiver, Miles Austin took a major step backwards in his age 27 season, hampered by knee and hamstring issues that knocked him out of six games and bothered him all year. Dez Bryant progressed in his second season from situational role player to solid starter, but he had a chance to establish himself as a dominant top-shelf receiver in Austin's absence and couldn't make the jump. The guy who really saved Dallas' season (as much as an 8-8 season can be saved, anyway) was Laurent Robinson, who set new career highs in pretty much everything. Robinson signed with Jacksonville in free agency, but that loss is not as devastating as it sounds. Robinson caught four total touchdowns in his first four seasons before catching 11 last year. Guys who see their production spike like that in one year usually see a similar decline the following season. Who will take Robinson's spot as the third receiver? That's a fine question. The Cowboys will go into training camp 11 men deep at the wide receiver position, including six college free agents from 2011 or 2012. The top two candidates are veteran Kevin Ogletree and fifth-round draftee Danny Coale out of Virginia Tech.

Jason Witten may be showing his age, posting his worst advanced metrics since his rookie season in 2003, but he still ranked among the top ten tight ends in DYAR. Martellus Bennett left for the Giants in free agency. He never lived up to the promise he showed in his rookie season, but the Cowboys have no obvious replacement. John Phillips will get first crack at the No. 2 position, but he has only 22 career receptions, and though he played every game last year he missed all of 2010 with a torn ACL. Sixth-round rookie James Hanna out of Oklahoma will also get a chance to earn playing time.

That leaves only one position group to discuss: the offensive line. Hopefully we can do a better job addressing it than the Cowboys did this offseason. With starting guards Montrae Holland and Kyle Kosier out the door, along with key backup Derrick Dockery, Dallas signed Cincinnati starter Nate Livings and Car-

**Table 3: First-round rookie CBs since 2005 (min. 40 targets)**

Player	Year	Tm	Suc%	AdjYd
Pacman Jones	2005	TEN	46%	7.2
Carlos Rogers	2005	WAS	51%	7.4
Fabian Washington	2005	OAK	53%	8.0
Tye Hill	2006	STL	48%	9.5
Johnathan Joseph	2006	CIN	53%	7.5
Kelly Jennings	2006	SEA	46%	6.7
Darrelle Revis	2007	NYJ	45%	8.3
Leon Hall	2007	CIN	31%	9.3
Aaron Ross	2007	NYG	47%	8.3
Leodis McKelvin	2008	BUF	44%	7.5
Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie	2008	ARI	53%	6.7
Mike Jenkins	2008	DAL	54%	6.6
Antoine Cason	2008	SD	55%	5.8
Vontae Davis	2009	MIA	47%	10.6
Joe Haden	2010	CLE	60%	6.0
Kareem Jackson	2010	HOU	47%	11.5
Devin McCourty	2010	NE	53%	7.1
Kyle Wilson	2010	NYJ	53%	6.3
Patrick Peterson	2011	ARI	45%	8.9
<b>AVERAGE</b>			<b>49%</b>	<b>7.9</b>

olina backup Mackenzy Bernadeau to replace them. Simple math will tell you that's a net loss, and that's considering only quantity, not even quality. The Cowboys will also get back a healthy Bill Nagy, but he was lousy last year even before he broke his leg.

That kind of see-what-sticks philosophy is nothing new in Dallas, where they've been just trying to make do on the offensive line for years. This team will spend high draft picks on pass rushers, they'll trade up for corners, they'll deal for wideouts like Roy Williams in the middle of the year, but with the exception of recent first-rounder Tyron Smith, it seems like they've consciously avoided investing resources in their offensive line.

This brings us back to that second weakness we teased at the beginning of this chapter. Dallas had a lot of trouble rushing in key situations, ranking 31st in DVOA on third down and 31st in the red zone. The real problem, though, was in short yardage, and it wasn't just rushing. On third or fourth down with 1 or 2 yards to go, the Cowboys' DVOA was -47.5%. Dallas was only the 18th team since 1991 to dip below -40% in this situation. (St. Louis also qualifies for this group, and Tampa Bay came close.) A look back at history shows that many of those teams rebounded well the next year—but not all of them (Table 4).

The Cowboys tried 22 third- or fourth-down runs with 1 or 2 yards to go last season, and picked up a first down just 59 percent of the time, compared to a league average of 67 percent. Things were even worse when Dallas tried to pass, as they converted just 8 of 19 opportunities, with three sacks and an interception for a whopping 1.9 yards per play.

These struggles contrast sharply with the Cowboys' use of the draw play. Dallas ranked second with 47 running back draws—the fourth straight year they have ranked first or second—and were third with a 7.9-yard average on those plays. What does it take to run a successful draw? Anyone who has watched Tony Romo knows he has great timing and execution of the draw, staring down a receiver and selling the pass, which gets pass rushers looping upfield and out of their run containment lanes. All the Cowboys' blockers have to do is push the defenders in the direction they wish to go. It requires timing and coordination, not brute force. In short-yardage, however, when it's more about muscle, the Dallas line came up woefully short.

Can the Cowboys turn it around this season? Obviously, many of the teams in Table 3 saw dramatic swings in fortune the next year. On the other hand, we have the turn-of-the-century Carolina Panthers, who managed to

finish 28th or worse in short-yardage offense five times in eight years between 1995 and 2002. Those Panthers, like these current Cowboys, had a tendency to ignore the offensive line on draft day. After taking Texas tackle Blake Brockermeier late in the first round of their first draft in 1995, the Panthers didn't add another first-round offensive lineman for eight years. Even in the second round, they added just one blocker. Finally, in 2003, they doubled up on linemen, taking Utah tackle Jordan Gross in the first round and Iowa guard Bruce Nelson in the second. Nelson ended up being a bust with just one start in his career, but the Panthers added Gross to the veterans they had been stockpiling in free agency (former first-rounder Todd Steussie, former third-rounder Kevin Donnalley) and saw enough improvement to reach the Super Bowl.

Let's compare that with what Dallas has done in the past eight years. First of all, they've been too eager to trade away picks, with only 11 picks in rounds one and two since 2006. And when they have picked players, they've taken two defensive backs, four front seven players, four skill position players (including two tight ends) and just one offensive lineman (Smith). You could try to draw a parallel between the Panthers drafting Gross and the Cowboys drafting Smith, but the 2003 Panthers still had a lot more talent on hand. They played that year with two former first-rounders and three other players taken in rounds three through six. The Cowboys' projected starting line has one former first-rounder, two seventh-rounders, and two undrafted players.

This is why the Claiborne trade was a questionable move. The Cowboys gave up a second-round pick, which they could have used to boost their offensive line, to take a cornerback, who will probably play badly in his first season. In all likelihood, that trade makes Dallas a worse team in 2012, even if Claiborne improves them in the long term.

The Cowboys are a talented but flawed bunch this year, with a stacked schedule that includes not only two games each against the Giants and Eagles, but also contests with the powerhouses of the AFC North and NFC South. It will probably be too much for this team to overcome. When Dallas enters the draft next year, they need to avoid trades, and stay away from the so-called playmakers. What this team needs is a couple of big uglies, some powerhouses who will see the door to the postseason and knock it down.

**Table 4: Teams Below -40% DVOA on Third-and-Short**

Year	Team	3rd-Short DVOA	Rk	3rd-Short DVOA Y+1	Rk Y+1
1999	CAR	-70.7%	31	-3.8%	17
2008	PIT	-66.4%	32	-21.5%	28
2002	DAL	-61.6%	32	16.5%	8
2001	CAR	-55.8%	31	-39.8%	31
2006	SF	-55.3%	32	-30.4%	29
2004	ARI	-54.6%	32	-14.0%	24
1992	SEA	-54.3%	28	14.6%	8
1991	PHX	-47.8%	28	11.8%	7
<b>2011</b>	<b>DAL</b>	<b>-47.5%</b>	<b>32</b>	--	--
2005	CHI	-47.4%	32	-15.7%	26
1995	CAR	-46.8%	30	-28.3%	28
1991	SEA	-45.6%	27	-54.3%	28
1998	IND	-45.1%	30	-4.4%	20
1998	DET	-44.9%	29	16.1%	9
2010	NYG	-44.0%	32	6.1%	12
<b>2011</b>	<b>STL</b>	<b>-41.0%</b>	<b>31</b>	--	--
2007	CAR	-40.7%	32	21.7%	6
2001	DAL	-40.3%	30	-61.6%	32
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>-50.5%</b>		<b>-11.7%</b>	

## 2011 Cowboys Stats by Week

Wk	vs.	W-L	PF	PA	YDF	YDA	TO	Total	Off	Def	ST
1	@NYJ	L	24	27	390	360	-1	3%	17%	-3%	-17%
2	@SF	W	27	24	472	206	-1	12%	15%	-14%	-16%
3	WAS	W	18	16	375	298	0	-22%	-32%	-7%	3%
4	DET	L	30	34	434	303	-2	22%	8%	-10%	4%
5	BYE										
6	@NE	L	16	20	377	371	2	25%	-8%	-31%	2%
7	STL	W	34	7	445	265	1	57%	35%	-22%	0%
8	@PHI	L	7	34	267	495	-1	-68%	-33%	40%	4%
9	SEA	W	23	13	442	381	2	20%	22%	7%	5%
10	BUF	W	44	7	433	271	4	61%	31%	-28%	1%
11	@WAS	W	27	24	353	339	2	-12%	-3%	-5%	-14%
12	MIA	W	20	19	303	352	-1	-14%	1%	13%	-2%
13	@ARI	L	13	19	336	327	0	-33%	-6%	27%	0%
14	NYG	L	34	37	444	510	0	28%	36%	8%	-1%
15	@TB	W	31	15	399	190	0	24%	23%	-6%	-5%
16	PHI	L	7	20	238	386	1	-29%	-21%	12%	4%
17	@NYG	L	14	31	300	437	-2	-23%	-4%	17%	-2%

## Trends and Splits

	Offense	Rank	Defense	Rank
Total DVOA	5.9%	12	0.4%	16
Unadjusted VOA	6.7%	12	-0.1%	14
Weighted Trend	7.3%	10	3.5%	20
Variance	8.3%	18	6.7%	19
Average Opponent	-0.8%	12	-1.2%	19
Passing	29.6%	5	8.5%	20
Rushing	-10.4%	27	-10.9%	8
First Down	2.6%	15	-6.1%	11
Second Down	10.3%	8	-3.6%	15
Third Down	5.0%	13	19.9%	29
First Half	11.1%	10	3.1%	20
Second Half	0.7%	14	-2.2%	13
Red Zone	-0.8%	12	-8.5%	18
Late and Close	9.1%	12	-1.8%	15

## Five-Year Performance

Year	W-L	Pyth	Est W	PF	PA	TO	Total	Rk	Off	Rk	Def	Rk	ST	Rk	Off AGL	Rk	Def AGL	Rk
2007	13-3	11.2	11.1	455	325	+5	22.9%	4	16.6%	4	-6.8%	9	-0.4%	18	19.6	14	26.2	22
2008	9-7	7.9	8.1	362	365	-11	2.5%	18	1.8%	17	-4.2%	9	-3.6%	27	24.2	17	29.1	19
2009	11-5	11.3	11.9	361	250	+2	25.5%	5	21.7%	3	-2.9%	10	1.0%	14	14.5	11	7.7	2
2010	6-10	7.0	6.8	394	436	0	-10.5%	23	-4.7%	21	6.3%	27	0.6%	15	20.7	12	11.1	7
2011	8-8	8.6	8.4	369	347	+4	3.5%	14	5.9%	12	0.4%	16	-2.1%	25	43.5	25	19.0	11

## 2011 Performance Based on Most Common Personnel Groups

Dallas Offense					Dallas Offense vs. Opp.				Dallas Defense				Dallas Defense vs. Opp.				
Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA	Run%	Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA	Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA	Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA	
1.1	32%	5.7	7.8%	15%	4-3-4	33%	6.2	23.5%	3-4-4	38%	5.5	-2.0%	1.1	43%	5.9	2.3%	
1.2	27%	7.0	28.6%	32%	3-4-4	24%	5.4	-9.4%	Dime+	27%	6.7	22.3%	1.2	27%	6.0	-3.0%	
2.2	14%	5.3	-5.5%	88%	4-2-5	21%	6.6	24.9%	2-4-5	13%	5.6	-8.9%	2.1	12%	4.4	-11.0%	
2.1	13%	6.5	23.4%	51%	Dime+	9%	8.0	47.1%	3-3-5	13%	5.4	-1.8%	1.3	4%	4.9	-34.7%	
1.3	8%	3.4	-30.1%	67%	3-3-5	6%	5.1	-24.3%	4-2-5	3%	7.5	-23.0%	2.2	4%	4.3	-10.1%	
0.2	4%	8.5	46.2%	0%													

## Strategic Tendencies

Run/Pass	Rank	Offense	Rank	Pass Rush	Rank	Defense/Other	Rank				
Runs, all plays	39%	23	Form: Single Back	52%	28	Rush 3	18.3%	1	4 DB	41%	26
Runs, first half	41%	21	Form: Empty Back	5%	16	Rush 4	49.0%	28	5 DB	31%	24
Runs, first down	45%	27	Pers: 3+ WR	37%	27	Rush 5	24.8%	11	6+ DB	27%	5
Runs, second-long	30%	24	Pers: 4+ WR	1%	25	Rush 6+	8.0%	14	CB by Sides	94%	4
Runs, power sit.	53%	23	Pers: 2+ TE/6+ OL	53%	3	Zone Blitz	5.2%	16	Go for it on 4th	0.82	24
Runs, behind 2H	23%	28	Play action	14%	30	Sacks by LB	67.9%	3	Offensive Pace	31.9	28
Pass, ahead 2H	44%	16	Max protect	9%	22	Sacks by DB	7.1%	15	Defensive Pace	30.1	7

No defensive coordinator likes to rush three and drop eight into coverage quite like Rob Ryan. The Browns led the league in this category in 2010, and the Cowboys did last season. Ryan blitzed much less than he did in Cleveland, but as is usually his custom, he sent the blitz less often on third down (27 percent of pass plays) than he did on first or second down (36 percent of pass plays). He rushed only three on 22 percent of third downs, and that strategy was very successful. The Cowboys allowed an average of 4.6 yards on these plays with a 78 percent Success Rate, compared to 7.9 yards and a 55 percent Success Rate they allowed when sending four or more pass rushers on third down. Somewhat connected to those lower blitz rates, the Cowboys' defensive Adjusted Sack Rate ranked fifth on first down and third on second down, but only 27th on third down. The Cowboys had the best defensive DVOA in the league against runs from shotgun, -28.8% DVOA and just 4.3 yards per carry. Dallas faced 35 running back screens, the third most in the league, but was excellent against this play with -49.0% DVOA. It wasn't just preventing YAC; the Cowboys disrupted screens to force 10 incomplete passes, an interception, and a sack. Cowboys opponents committed a league-low 92 opponent penalties. Looking only at "standard" plays (i.e. four defensive backs), the Cowboys were far better against 4-3 defenses than they were against 3-4 defenses. Their gap between 4-3-4 and 3-4-4 is 32.9% DVOA, second-highest in the league behind New Orleans (and New Orleans had only 52 plays against 3-4-4, whereas Dallas had at least 240 plays against each of the two formations). Unfortunately, we don't have defensive formation numbers for 2010 to know if this is a fluke or a trend, but we'll watch this closely to see if it continues in 2012.

### Passing

Player	DYAR	DVOA	Plays	NtYds	Avg	YAC	C%	TD	Int
T.Romo	1344	26.8%	555	3969	7.2	5.7	66.9%	31	10
S.McGee	3	-10.0%	41	157	3.8	3.6	63.2%	1	0
J.Kitna*	4	-5.3%	10	87	8.7	5.0	60.0%	1	2
K.Orton	97	-5.4%	262	1686	6.4	5.0	60.4%	9	9

### Receiving

Player	DYAR	DVOA	Plays	Ctch	Yds	Y/C	YAC	TD	C%
D.Bryant	262	20.5%	103	63	931	14.8	4.8	9	61%
L.Robinson*	327	40.0%	81	54	858	15.9	4.9	11	67%
M.Austin	139	11.3%	73	43	579	13.5	4.7	7	59%
K.Ogletree	-13	-19.0%	26	15	173	11.5	4.3	0	58%
J.Holley	72	118.8%	7	7	169	24.1	8.6	0	100%
J.Witten	102	5.6%	117	79	942	11.9	4.6	5	68%
M.Bennett*	-27	-23.7%	26	17	144	8.5	5.6	0	65%
J.Phillips	-6	-11.8%	18	15	101	6.7	6.0	1	83%
F.Jones	28	-3.0%	44	33	231	7.0	7.7	0	75%
D.Murray	-8	-17.8%	35	26	183	7.0	8.6	0	74%
T.Choice*	-22	-45.4%	15	12	66	5.5	6.8	0	80%
S.Morris*	-19	-87.4%	7	5	13	2.6	3.0	0	71%
L.Vickers	-21	-50.3%	8	4	29	7.3	5.3	0	50%

### Rushing

Player	DYAR	DVOA	Plays	Yds	Avg	TD	Fum	Suc
D.Murray	149	12.6%	164	896	5.5	2	1	58%
F.Jones	-3	-9.1%	127	575	4.5	1	4	52%
S.Morris*	-5	-12.5%	28	98	3.5	0	0	43%
T.Choice*	-55	-59.0%	27	80	3.0	0	2	30%
P.Tanner	-12	-20.2%	22	76	3.5	1	0	45%
T.Romo	-4	-18.0%	12	53	4.4	1	1	--

### Offensive Line

Year	Yards	ALY	Rank	Power	Rank	Stuff	Rank	2nd Lev	Rank	Open Field	Rank	F-Start	Cont.
2009	5.00	4.48	3	58%	26	17%	10	1.36	3	1.15	5	25	39
2010	3.87	4.14	12	54%	26	18%	13	1.10	20	0.49	26	27	34
2011	4.63	4.26	6	57%	23	19%	16	1.31	8	0.97	9	23	36

Year	LE	Rank	LT	Rank	Mid	Rank	RT	Rank	RE	Rank	Sacks	ASR	Rank	Short	Long
2009	5.21	3	5.03	4	4.19	13	4.16	15	4.87	4	34	6.2%	16	12	15
2010	4.52	12	3.46	29	4.17	11	4.33	9	3.99	16	31	5.8%	11	13	8
2011	4.94	6	4.77	5	4.36	9	3.27	29	3.82	13	39	6.1%	13	10	19

On the whole the Cowboys line played pretty well last year, despite the team's short-yardage problems. There were some struggles running to the right, and our charters noted that many of those troubles began with Tyron Smith, but it's not unusual for rookies to struggle. And the sack rate wasn't great, but a lot of that is because

Tony Romo tended to hang on to the ball for too long—only eight teams gave up fewer short sacks. There will be changes for 2012, as the Cowboys hired a new offensive line coach, Bill Callahan, and chose to jettison a number of veterans. They cut right guard Kyle Kosier after the season, and opted not to re-sign Montrae Holland. That's a bit of a surprise, because the Cowboys' running game improved substantially after Holland replaced rookie Bill Nagy in the lineup, going from 3.65 Adjusted Line Yards per carry through Week 6 to 4.61 ALY afterwards.

Rather than wait to see what line of talent they could get in the draft, the Cowboys made a pair of free agent signings, taking Mackenzy Bernadeau from the Panthers and Nate Livings from the Bengals. Livings has started every game for the past two seasons, while Bernadeau came off the bench 14 times for Carolina after starting 12 contests in 2010. Callahan told Charean Williams of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in May that Bernadeau was penciled in as the starter at right guard with Livings manning the left side. However, Bernadeau had hip surgery in May, which opens things up for Nagy (who played badly in four starts before breaking his ankle last year) to return to the starting lineup. Callahan has also said that Livings and Nagy will have a chance to unseat Phil Costa at center. The tackles are the same as last year, but they're switching spots, with Smith taking over the left tackle spot in his second season and Doug Free moving to the right side.

## Defensive Front Seven

Defensive Line	Age	Pos	Plays	TmPct	Overall							Pass Rush			vs. Run		vs. Pass				
					Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTKl	St%	Rk	AvYd	Rk	Sack	Hit	Hur	Runs	St%	Yds	Pass	St%	Yds
Jay Ratliff	31	DT	41	5.5%	18	30	14	1	73%	50	1.9	37	2	4	15	34	71%	2.1	7	86%	1.1
Jenyon Coleman	33	DE	39	5.2%	39	34	10	2	87%	13	1.4	41	1	1	3	33	85%	1.9	6	100%	-1.5
Jason Hatcher	30	DE	29	4.8%	45	23	9	2	79%	37	1.1	34	4.5	7	6	21	76%	2.6	8	88%	-2.8
Sean Lissemore	25	DT	28	3.7%	45	21	7	0	75%	45	1.4	15	2	3	4.5	25	72%	2.1	3	100%	-4.3
Marcus Spears	29	DE	18	2.4%	--	14	5	0	78%	--	1.7	--	1	2	1	13	77%	1.8	5	80%	1.6

Linebackers	Age	Pos	Plays	TmPct	Overall				Pass Rush			vs. Run			vs. Pass							
					Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTKl	AvYd	Sack	Hit	Hur	Runs	St%	Rk	Yds	Rk	Tgts	Suc%	Rk	AdjYd	Rk
Sean Lee	26	ILB	109	15.5%	17	65	23	8	4.9	0	3	7	66	67%	48	3.5	66	42	51%	41	5.6	21
Anthony Spencer	28	OLB	66	8.8%	68	45	20	3	3.6	6	12	26	45	71%	29	2.9	33	10	52%	--	9.7	--
DeMarcus Ware	30	OLB	58	7.7%	85	48	28	1	-0.8	19.5	11	23	24	71%	30	2.2	12	7	59%	--	3.3	--
Keith Brooking*	37	ILB	50	6.7%	99	24	4	5	5.9	0	1	1	33	61%	73	4.3	100	17	58%	10	4.4	5
Bradie James*	31	ILB	44	5.9%	104	24	3	3	4.8	0	2	2	32	56%	90	4.1	89	12	53%	--	6.5	--
Victor Butler	25	OLB	17	2.3%	--	17	8	3	1.1	3	4	10	10	100%	--	1.3	--	1	100%	--	0.9	--
Dan Connor	27	ILB	72	9.6%	58	44	6	1	4.1	0	0	0	63	65%	55	2.9	31	6	57%	--	5.8	--

Year	Yards	ALY	Rank	Power	Rank	Stuff	Rank	2nd Lev	Rank	Open Field	Rank
2009	4.02	3.99	13	67%	19	17%	23	1.05	5	0.69	12
2010	4.40	4.27	22	70%	29	14%	29	1.10	14	0.87	19
2011	4.03	3.92	10	57%	10	22%	9	1.13	11	0.66	9

Year	LE	Rank	LT	Rank	Mid	Rank	RT	Rank	RE	Rank	Sacks	ASR	Rank	Short	Long
2009	2.91	4	3.80	10	4.05	17	4.33	22	4.23	22	43	7.0%	12	14	14
2010	4.72	23	3.39	6	4.39	24	4.16	16	4.79	30	35	6.9%	11	14	14
2011	3.51	6	4.81	31	3.58	2	4.04	13	4.04	25	42	7.6%	6	14	18

Is DeMarcus Ware the best defensive player in football? He's certainly the best pass rusher. In the past five seasons, Ware leads all players with 80 sacks, and Jared Allen (77.5) is the only other player over 55. The Cowboys used the franchise tag to stop Anthony Spencer from leaving, which may seem strange for a player who has never had more than six sacks in a season. However, Spencer has 17 quarterback hits and 40 hurries over the last two seasons. He's been a half-step away from making a major impact, and Dallas is banking on him finding that extra half-step.

On the inside, 2010 second-rounder Sean Lee played well in his first season as a starter, but Dallas declined to bring back either Keith Brooking or Bradie James. To start alongside Lee they grabbed Dan Connor from the Carolina Panthers. A third-round pick in 2008, Connor has been a starter for two years (though he missed half the 2010 season). Though he's much younger than James or Brooking, he's still a two-down stopgap. That's fine on a team that already has a strong pass-coverage linebacker like Lee.

On the defensive line, Kenyon Coleman and Jason Hatcher were clear upgrades over Marcus Spears and Igor Olshansky. Jay Ratliff also enjoyed a nice bounceback season, perhaps because he was fresh—backup Sean Lissemore saw some significant action. All three starters (plus Spears and Lissemore) return in 2012, and they'll be joined by third-round pick Tyrone Crawford (Boise State). Crawford lacks elite playmaking athleticism, but has good size and strength at the point of attack, making him an ideal fit for a 3-4 end.

## Defensive Secondary

Secondary	Age	Pos	Overall						vs. Run						vs. Pass								
			Plays	TmPct	Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTKl	Runs	St%	Rk	Yds	Rk	Tgts	Tgt%	Rk	Dist	Suc%	Rk	APaYd	Rk	PD	Int
Gerald Sensabaugh	29	SS	76	10.1%	37	18	8	6	30	33%	53	10.6	72	26	6.2%	52	12.7	24%	77	14.5	77	3	2
Abram Elam*	31	FS	65	8.7%	53	17	10	4	26	42%	30	5.0	8	25	6.1%	56	14.2	59%	30	5.6	9	0	0
Terence Newman*	34	CB	61	9.3%	23	17	7	6	12	33%	53	11.3	75	69	19.0%	31	13.2	43%	73	10.0	76	11	4
Orlando Scandrick	25	CB	54	8.8%	32	21	14	2	12	50%	27	7.3	47	48	14.2%	64	11.3	48%	59	8.5	60	5	1
Alan Ball*	27	CB	38	5.1%	79	11	5	1	6	33%	53	16.2	81	48	11.6%	72	11.3	44%	71	8.6	62	7	1
Mike Jenkins	27	CB	32	5.7%	75	14	6	4	5	20%	74	7.2	46	48	15.5%	54	12.3	56%	26	7.2	35	9	1
Frank Walker*	31	CB	26	4.0%	--	8	6	3	6	33%	--	10.3	--	20	5.5%	--	8.9	52%	--	6.0	--	2	1
Barry Church	24	SS	20	3.3%	--	6	2	0	7	57%	--	4.3	--	8	2.4%	--	8.1	64%	--	4.3	--	0	0
Brandon Carr	26	CB	60	7.3%	57	26	11	7	12	50%	27	6.8	39	73	20.9%	17	15.0	55%	27	6.2	17	13	4
Brddney Pool	28	FS	36	5.4%	73	13	3	2	16	44%	28	6.9	40	19	5.2%	65	13.3	69%	7	3.9	2	3	1

Year	Pass D Rank	vs. #1 WR	Rk	vs. #2 WR	Rk	vs. Other WR	Rk	vs. TE	Rk	vs. RB	Rk
2009	15	-10.3%	10	-8.7%	9	13.0%	26	22.1%	27	16.1%	24
2010	28	44.1%	32	15.5%	26	2.9%	20	-11.9%	4	-11.2%	6
2011	22	14.0%	19	53.3%	31	-26.9%	6	19.1%	21	-3.6%	15

It's no surprise that all three of Dallas' top cornerbacks were either demoted or fired. Dallas found new starters by paying a king's ransom in money to Brandon Carr, and another king's ransom in draft picks to the Rams in exchange for Morris Claiborne. We already explained why expectations for Claiborne should be held in check, but Carr is a clear upgrade. Even though he was the secondary corner in Kansas City behind Brandon Flowers, he was still a far sight better than anyone in Dallas. Mike Jenkins and Orlando Scandrick will battle each other for the nickel spot, unless Jenkins is (as is often rumored) dealt away.

There's one other new starter in the Dallas backfield, where it's goodbye Abram Elam, hello Brodney Pool. Only seven teams surrendered more 20-yard completions than Dallas, and only six defenses had a worse DVOA on deep passes (16-plus yards through the air). Pool has been top ten among safeties in both success rate and yards per pass in each of the last two years, but on just 41 targets in 29 games, and he was primarily a bench player for the Jets last season.

Gerald Sensabaugh's numbers plummeted after a career year in 2010. We've likely seen the best of him, but there are only so many players you can replace in one offseason. Fourth-rounder Matt Johnson is likely Sensabaugh's future replacement, but the Eastern Washington alum will likely stick to special teams this year.

## Special Teams

Year	DVOA	Rank	FG/XP	Rank	Net Kick	Rank	Kick Ret	Rank	Net Punt	Rank	Punt Ret	Rank	Hidden	Rank
2009	0.8%	14	-10.7	29	10.7	3	-5.9	23	0.0	19	10.7	5	-3.2	21
2010	0.5%	15	-5.5	29	1.2	15	-14.6	31	6.3	10	15.3	2	-14.6	30
2011	-1.8%	25	1.6	13	1.6	14	1.2	14	-5.0	23	-9.7	30	3.6	11



The biggest weakness for Dallas came in punt returns. Dez Bryant and Dwayne Harris each had 15 returns, and each was worth roughly -4.0 estimated points of field position. Don't look for many changes here, though. Instead, the Cowboys will hope that Bryant can play like he did in 2010, when he was second to Devin Hester in value on punt returns. Dallas used a committee approach on kickoff returns last year, with nine players getting at least one return and none getting more than eight. Expect Harris and Felix Jones to be the top men for the job in 2012, but there's plenty of flexibility here. Punter Mat McBriar had one of his worst campaigns in 2011, struggling with drop foot that required surgery after the season, and Dallas let him go. Replacement Chris Jones looked good in the last two weeks of last season, and special teams coach Joe DeCamillis has raved about Jones' athleticism, raising at least the threat of a fake punt here and there. Dan Bailey will be back for his second season at kicker, but the Cowboys may want to consider a kickoff specialist. Bailey's gross kickoff value last year was -4.7 points, near the bottom of the league.

## Coaching Staff

The Cowboys spent their offseason adding big names and proven commodities on defense, without making a significant addition on offense. While that largely speaks to the team's imbalance in 2011, it also says a lot about Jason Garrett, who clearly feels that he can take what he has and win a championship. Meanwhile, Rob Ryan went on a mini-media blitz after the draft, defending the efforts of his players, taking blame for the failures of 2011 (saying he had tried to teach the team too much, too fast) and telling reporters after one minicamp that "We're gonna be damn good." That's partly because he's a Ryan and talking big is what they do, but the man has been an NFL defensive coordinator for nearly a decade, and he probably wants his name to surface when any head coaching jobs come available at the end of the year.